



Soldiers

Military reservations, past and present, echo with the voices of soldiers who have passed through. Streets are named and buildings are erected to honor the heroic acts and extraordinary service of individuals. One valley in the Presidio was named, not for a prestigious officer, but for a regiment of rowdy southerners that briefly encamped on post.

Tennessee was the only Post-Reconstruction Southern state to raise volunteer regiments for service in the Spanish American War. The roster for the 1st Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment was finalized in June of 1898. Its members were told to wear their shabbiest clothes and board a train bound for San Francisco. Although these Tennesseans were scheduled to receive their uniforms in Nashville, they were never issued the promised attire and the men arrived in San Francisco wearing their worst.



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Maj. James T. Quarles...Portraits, GOGA 33786.

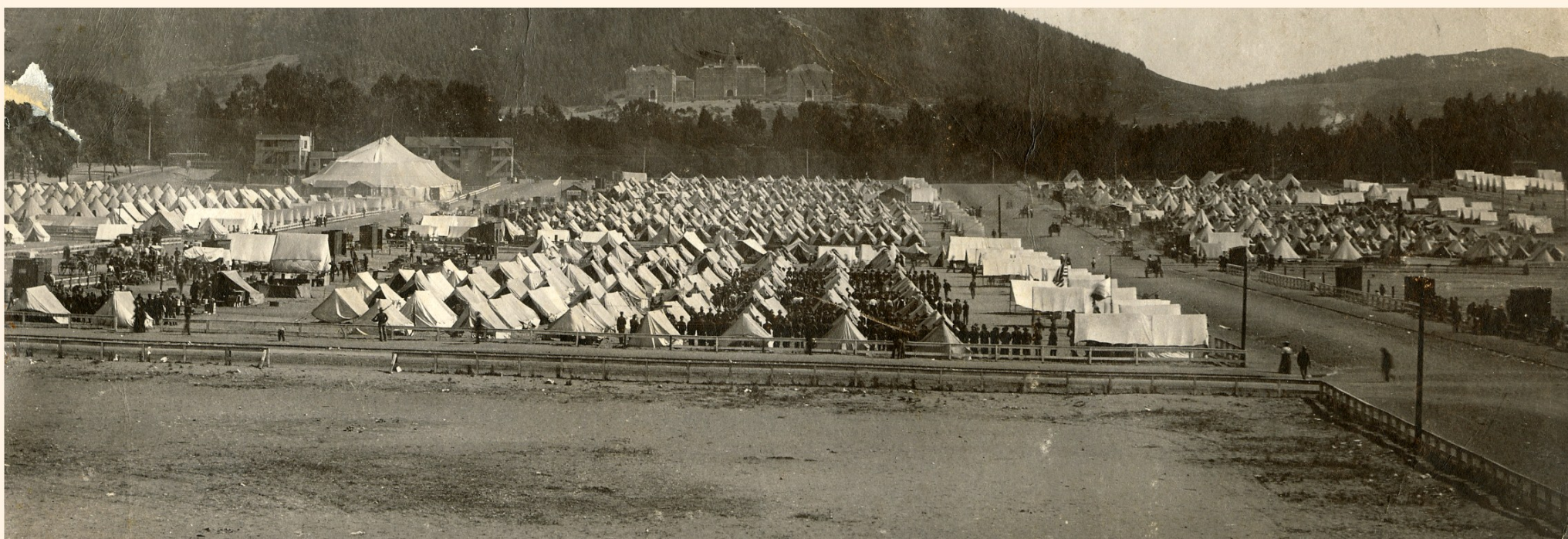


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The men of the 1st Tennessee, such as John H. Tarkington (left) and Daniel Lee Simpson (right), fondly recalled the “free-handed” hospitality they received from San Franciscans. One young volunteer found “Frisco” women so alluring that he lamented, “I don’t see how I will ever be able to come to Nashville after mixing with western people.”

When they reached Camp Merritt, the Tennesseans sought to prove their worth under terrible conditions. Unaccustomed to the cold and foggy San Francisco climate, many of the men contracted illnesses and were sent to a substandard field hospital. After losing 24 men to pneumonia, the regiment was relocated to Camp Merriam in an eastern valley of the Presidio.

Once they detrained, the disheveled southerners marched down Market Street to their encampment. As they passed, San Franciscans who lined the street for a glimpse of the Tennesseans were amazed at what they saw, and the word “raggedy” was uttered throughout the crowd. Upon reflection, a regimental veterans publication admitted “we cannot congratulate ourselves on the soldierly appearance of the boys as we marched through the city to the sand dunes of Camp Merritt...but under our parti-colored coats beat manly hearts filled with patriotism.”



Golden Gate NRA, Park Archives, Davis Spanish American War...Photograph Collection, GOGA 36990.

In 1898, land bounded by present-day Geary Boulevard, Fulton Street, Arguello Boulevard, and Sixth Avenue was offered for war use by The Crocker Estate Company. On this site, formerly the Bay District Race Track, the U.S. Army established Camp Richmond, later renamed Camp Merritt in honor of its Commanding Officer, General Wesley Merritt.



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Luther Kirkpatrick (above) was the bugler for Company C of the 1st Tennessee. At Camp Merriam (right) the regiment is encamped in the valley that would later bear its name.



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